

January 29, 2020

Hi everyone,

I am sending along this excerpt from my research statement in the hopes that it will help situate your reading of the chapter.

Looking forward to hearing your feedback!

Very best,

Umayyah

My book project, *Media Intifada: Palestine and Media Activism in the United States*, offers a cultural history of Arab American media activism focused on Palestine. Spanning from the 1970s through the early 2000s, *Media Intifada* chronicles forty years of Arab American media activism and various controversies that have surrounded that activism. From the production of educational film strips, public television broadcasting, and narrative and documentary filmmaking, to film festival organizing and participation in Hollywood awards shows, Arab American activists and their allies have leveraged media production and distribution to resist gender and ethnic stereotypes, cultivate solidarities, and produce knowledge about Palestine for general American audiences. Additionally, such media production and consumption has emerged as a vital process through which Arab Americans express their cultural politics while cultivating and maintaining their cultural identities in diaspora.

The book is structured in five chapters. Chapter One, “Production and Distribution: The Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG)” is based on archival research using the AAUG collection at Eastern Michigan University. This chapter examines how the AAUG produced and distributed a series of educational filmstrips throughout the 1970s, as well as served as an independent film distributor in the 1980s for a number of blacklisted films, including David Koff’s *Occupied Palestine*. Chapter Two, “The Blacklisting of *Occupied Palestine*” examines several controversies surrounding Jewish- American filmmaker David Koff’s documentary film in the early 1980s. Attempts to censor its broadcast on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations nationwide in 1986 resulted in local PBS stations opting to show the film with the accompaniment of partisan panel discussions between Arab American activists—oftentimes from the AAUG—and Zionist activists. This controversy around *Occupied Palestine* drew widespread attention to the Palestinian cause in ways previously unseen in the United States, in that the accompanying panel discussion broadcasts brought Palestinian and Arab American voices directly into American living rooms.

Chapter Three, “An *Uprising* at *The Perfect Moment*: Palestinian and LGBTQ Media Solidarities,” examines two overlapping controversies at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art in the early 1990s over Robert Mapplethorpe’s sexually explicit photography and Elia Suleiman’s Palestinian film and video art series. LGBTQ free speech activists who had fought hard to resist the attempted censorship of Mapplethorpe’s work came to Suleiman’s defense in the face of ICA’s attempt to censor the *Uprising* show. In this moment, LGBTQ activists and

Palestinian activists forged a critical solidarity through their shared investments in freedom of expression and self-determination.

Chapter Four, “It’s an Honor Just to be Nominated: Palestine Goes to Hollywood,” covers the period from 1970 to 2006. This chapter tracks how the struggle over Palestinian self-determination entered American cinema’s ritualistic ceremonies of recognition and legitimization, such as the Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards. Since the 1970s, the awards ceremonies themselves have served as platforms from which celebrities have made political statements about Palestine, Iraq, and issues related to the Middle East. However, the process of film submission, nomination, and award granting has also proven to be a site of contestation as Palestinian filmmakers have challenged Hollywood’s written and unwritten rules about national eligibility for inclusion and recognition in these awards shows. Chapter Five, “Projections of Palestine: Film Festivals and Diasporic Identity in the United States,” is based on ethnographic research at the Boston Palestine Film Festival and examines the role of film festival participation in cultivating, maintaining, and representing Palestinian identity in diaspora.

In addition to being organized chronologically, the chapters chart the development of different genres of Palestine solidarity media and their movement through different kinds of exhibition spaces. This structure in turn shows how shifts in technology, genre, distribution, and exhibition practices propelled Palestine solidarity politics further into the US public sphere. Section One is concerned primarily with the genre of educational media, such as filmstrips and documentary films, and their exhibition in smaller, intimate, more private spaces, such as living rooms, classrooms, and church basements. Section Two examines the shift toward narrative cinema, experimental video art, and auto-biographical documentary filmmaking, and in turn, follows the movement of this kind of Palestine solidarity media into more publicly accessible institutional spaces such as museums and theaters. Lastly, Section Three more closely examines efforts to “mainstream” Palestine solidarity media through a process of standardization and institutionalization. The book therefore documents these shifts in order to historicize how media activism has served as a key strategy within the larger project of Arab American activism and the cultivation of Palestine solidarity politics.